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LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE COOK ISLANDS

Over many years attempts have been made to found a Museum Society and to form a library. It was known that a library once existed in Rarotonga and that, at one time, Stephen Savage, author of *A Dictionary of the Maori language of Rarotonga*, acted as librarian, but it is not known who started it. As late as 1936, a considerable number of old books, many of them wormeaten, were housed in the Court-room but the collection was later disbanded. A few years later Joe and Esther Stubbs began a lending library with Country Library Service books, which was maintained in cramped quarters purely by voluntary effort. Finally the library committee raised funds and organised a working bee to erect a small building on the site adjoining the bowling green. The stock of this library, and the enthusiasm of its supporters, formed the nucleus for the present Cook Islands Library.

A Cook Islands Society was established in 1942, with the objects of collecting for a Museum, encouraging the Maori arts and crafts and preserving sites of historical interest in the Cook Islands. It received an

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offer of the old Parliament Building as premises, but ill fortune dogged the project. After the 1943 hurricane the building was needed as a school room and a change to a less sympathetic Resident Commissioner together with the difficulty in obtaining a site led to the disintegration of the Society.

In 1947 the Cook Islands Museum Society, with Dr Tom Davis as one of the initiators, was formed with membership open to Maoris only. They raised some money and, after having difficulty in obtaining a site on which to build, eventually found one and Princess Te Puea from New Zealand laid the foundation stone, but the building proceeded little further.

Efforts to establish a Museum remained in abeyance until, in 1961, Mr A. O. Dare, Resident Commissioner, called a meeting to establish a museum and library and an action committee was elected. Again the choice of a site proved very difficult, as only those who know land tenure problems in Rarotonga can fully realise. Then Makea Nui Teremoana Ariki offered a site of two roods and 27 perches at Taputapuatea which was gratefully accepted. The Committee set out to raise £6,000, which the Legislative Assembly agreed to subsidise on a pound for pound basis, thus giving a working capital of £12,000 with which to erect the building, furnish it with shelves, fittings and initial bookstock. The money had to be raised within three years and tremendous efforts were made to reach the target. In order to keep within the budget the original idea of a larger community centre had to be abandoned. Mr H. V. Bonny, UNESCO Library Adviser, made a report, the museum project was discussed with Dr R. Duff, Director of the Canterbury Museum, and Mr K. Mills, the Honorary Architect, prepared the plans. The Cook Islands Library and Museum Society was constituted in April 1963 and now has a membership of approximately 200.

The actual building was begun at the end of September 1963. Difficulty in obtaining supplies and the need to do much by voluntary labour added to the delays. The shell of the building is complete, but many fittings for the Library and all the fittings for the Museum still remain to be finished. Meanwhile the landscaping of the grounds is proceeding at a slow island pace.

The Council of the Cook Islands Library and Museum Society of ten members and two representatives from the Assembly control the policy of the Library. The Librarian, as a public servant, is responsible to the Secretary of the Government, and her duties include acting as adviser to all government libraries and schools if required. The Library staff's salaries are paid by the Government, who also provide a yearly grant of £1,000 for running costs and a pound for pound subsidy on raised money, up to £250 a year. Members of the Society pay ten shillings a year subscription and receive a newsletter, notices of meetings—general meetings, usually lectures, slides, films, are always open to the public and may draw up to 200 people—and free membership of the library.

The library was opened with a small ceremony on 22 December 1964. It is free to all residents of the Cook Islands and to members of the Society. There are no enrolment fees, no fines, no rental fees, so that in a low economy structure, where labourers earn £3 15s. in a 40-hour week, there is no financial hindrance to joining the library. The only charge is for lost or damaged books.

The building is an attractive concrete and glass structure in park-like surroundings, down the Church road, off the main road of Avarua, Rarotonga. Since land is owned not by individuals but by families, it was impossible to obtain a more central site, and in some ways the seclusion of the site has distinct advantages in noisy Polynesia. A primary school with a roll of 600 is just across the road, and the compound of the Takamoa Theological College, with its boys and girls hostels for secondary pupils and Training College students, is a few paces further down the road.

It is a single storey building, with a flat hurricane-proof roof, tied to twelve steel trusses. All windows except those at the entrance are louvred. The library portion is set under a wide overhang to shade the windows. The ceiling is varnished to reduce glare, the concrete walls and the steel shelves are white, the pillars of the steel trusses blue, and the lino tiles beige. The glassed entrance leads to an exhibition lobby 17 X 20 ft; the library itself of 1,080 sq. ft. and library workroom of 500 sq. ft. lie to the left of the entrance with the museum section of 1,980 sq. ft. on the right. The partitions of the workroom are so made that they can be altered, but the shape of the workroom is determined by the position of the steel pillars that run down the centre of the building. Six easy chairs provide comfort and a splash of colour, while three large tables afford study space. The shelving which lines two walls and part of the workroom partition is already filled and has had to be extended under the front windows for the children's section. All joinery, except for the catalogue cabinet, has been made locally by the Public Works Department and most of the stationery has been printed by the local Government Printing Office. There is a magazine rack near the exhibition lobby, with the two unit issue desk opposite, which forms an L-shape around the angle of the workroom. A newspaper stand was intended for the far wall of the library but will have to be shifted to the lobby to allow for more non-fiction stocks. As yet the workroom lacks all fittings.

Book stock has been formed from the old Rarotonga library together with substantial donations which include a number of valuable Pacific books, and very generous assistance from National Library Service who provide books on indefinite loan, 800 adult books on exchange, loan collections and an experimental request service. There are more than 5,000 books in stock with still much of the initial £1,000 book order to come to hand. About 40 periodicals are received, intended for reading in the library only. Superseded copies are to be sent to the Northern Group of outer islands.

In Rarotonga education is free and compulsory from the age of six. In the first two years lessons are taught in the vernacular; thereafter in English, aiming at School Certificate standard at Tereora College, and the three new Junior High Schools. Previously secondary education was available by scholarship to New Zealand, and, for selected pupils only, at Tereora College to School Certificate standard. Most school buildings are a credit to New Zealand administration and while there are a number of teachers trained at New Zealand teachers' colleges, most teachers in the primary schools come from the local Training College, with two years' secondary education and three years' training. There is one primary school, Nikao Side School, which caters for children who speak English at home—staffed by New Zealanders and conforming in syllabus and school starting age to the standards of a New Zealand country school.

Although the Cook Islanders have had contact with Europeans since early missionary times and have lost a great deal of their own culture in adopting European ways, they have retained their language. English is very much a secondary language for them and when this is coupled with a lack of comprehension of the outside world, particularly for those whose background is a coral atoll, it becomes very difficult to supply enough material that they can easily understand.

Much harm has been done in the islands by years of donations of secondhand books from kindly and well-meaning organisations. These books have not been screened for suitability and condition and have fostered a "caretaker" attitude—books must be kept, accounted for, valued as possessions, but used? discarded when obsolete? or in revolting condition?—these are strange ideas. This is particularly noticeable in the schools, and in an attempt to break through this attitude, a School Library Service depot has been set up in the library.

Interests are very wide. The total European population of the Islands, about 380, represents most professions and trades with an interest in many hobbies which cannot be pursued in Rarotonga but which they wish to continue to read about. A considerable number of people, both Maori and European, are studying and taking examinations—extra-mural University studies, trade examinations, correspondence lessons for University Entrance, radio, post and telegraph, civil engineering and so on. With a library membership of 1,100, two-thirds of whom are junior borrowers, these interests cannot be ignored. We are very much indebted to National Library Service's help with a request service in which, of necessity, books spend much of their time at sea, and are subject to somewhat perilous methods of transport.

In some cases, the children are reading at a higher level than the adults, so that most topics seem to be required at all levels and all ages. The Young Adult section contains books at a level at least two years' lower than is usual in New Zealand, but it is a characteristic

of the Cook Islands Library that borrowers may select books wherever they wish. Having accepted the library, the Polynesians feel free to use all of it. The children may come in for a daily bounce on the foam-cushioned chairs, or invade the library in hordes as soon as school closes at one o'clock, hurriedly scramble for a book, and be reading quietly round a corner two hours later. Occasionally an adult group will come because the one English-speaking member wants to consult a Pacific book. You may then see adults sitting on the floor reading picture books, which are adjacent to the Pacific section, while children, in the comfort of the easy chairs, look through well-illustrated adult books. Polynesians have no discrimination about books. Small boys read avidly Maj Lindman's *Flicka, Ricka, Dicka Bake a Cake* and Marjory Flack's *The New Pet*, while their older brothers ask for romances. Girls will take out technical books and those dealing with men's sport. The romance section is the most widely read, but it is natural for the Maoris to home for the non-fiction. In spite of the popularity of western films the westerns are not sought after. There is a vociferous demand, but including only a few Maoris, for science fiction, a poor response for short stories, but a demand for historical novels. Considering how difficult Cook Islanders find it to envisage present-day life in the outer world, one shudders to think of their comprehension of historical novels. The need for material in the Rarotongan language is very hard to satisfy and the section written in Maori has yet to be built up. Home reference books such as dictionaries, atlases, and grammars are needed, but the local people, Maori and European, do not yet use the library as a reference centre. This is particularly noticeable because of the use the visitors make of the reference facilities.

The Library is open on two evenings a week and each Saturday morning, as well as weekday afternoons: a total of 26 hours. The empty Museum section has been set up as a study centre until the exhibits are ready. As long as the library is open, anyone may study there. This satisfies a need similar to that in rural districts in New Zealand, where life in a crowded pa resembles village life in kikaus in the Cooks.

Though the climate of Rarotonga is almost idyllic it favours mildew, which attacks all books without jackets. Plastic jackets on new books seem to provide protection. There is a variety of insects which invade the library and books arriving by sea come complete with insect life from the ship. General cleanliness deals with most of this but it is impossible for a staff of two to paint all books with anti-cockroach and bookworm beetle mixtures. Ideally one should have air conditioning; in practice, constant use of books (difficult to provide for all sections in the initial stages of a library) does much to prevent insect activity.

Communication with the twelve inhabited outer islands is difficult. The islands are scattered over an area of 850,000 square miles from nine degrees south of the Equator to the Tropic of Capricorn. Raro-

tonga has a population of 9,000 out of a total of 19,000, and from Rarotonga, local shipping goes approximately monthly to the Southern Group but sometimes only once or twice a year to some of the Northern Group. The librarian visited four of the Southern Group; Aitutaki, Mangaia, Mauke and Atiu, which together with Rarotonga make up 82 per cent of the population, to assess library service, and found these islands very distinctive, each with its own housing standards, experience of contact with Europeans, facility in English and with even the character of the people differing from island to island. A trial service to these four islands began in July, with basic collections of 100 to 200 books, a proportion being exchanged whenever shipping permits. Local committees have been set up and have built shelves in a public hall, office, dental clinic or some similar central place. The two major difficulties are the hazard of getting cargo over the reefs, without it being damaged by sea water or irretrievably lost, and the lack of knowledge of what a library is, what borrowing means and of how to treat books.

At present the membership of our library is predominantly youthful. Those in the over 30 age group, and those from the four main outer villages of Rarotonga have not yet been attracted to the library in any number. There has been no great publicity for the library, but it is hoped to do more when the Museum is completed. Word of mouth is, however, a satisfactory and more stable method of getting new borrowers. Although there is no public transport system, most people come in for shopping on Saturday mornings, when the library is open and could cater for greater numbers. Overdues are done by telephone, or by meeting someone in the street. There is a postal service to a store in each village, which we have not yet used, and though losses are higher than in New Zealand, they are still moderate. A classified catalogue has been chosen to enable us to stocktake easily. Some losses occur because of the frequent journeys of the Cook Islanders from Avarua to the Outer Islands, New Zealand or Tahiti. Contact with New Zealand is maintained by a weekly airmail service and a monthly shipping service. Contact with the Outer Islands may be vastly improved when the Seventh Day Adventist Church begins its Apache plane service to small landing strips later this year.

With the coming of self-government this is a particularly interesting time in the Cook Islands. Few people have asked for books relating to the change and the elections, and it is interesting that so far only three members of the Assembly use the library. Reading is not yet a habit for the Islanders; they are unable to discriminate between books to find merit or assess information, and many of the political changes and problems of current world affairs are beyond their education. But these are times of great change and of great pressures for advancement and the Cook Islands Library is part of that advance.